# An open letter to those who are considering death doula training:

Hello! Thank you for your question about death doula training and working as a death doula. I get this question regularly from folks who are interested in this path and who want to talk to someone who is doing the work. I created this document to answer some frequent questions folks ask in the hopes that it is useful for you. I apologize that I don’t always have time to respond to personal inquiries about this work beyond sharing this. I wish you good luck in your efforts!

Here goes!

**Hospice Training**

I completed Hospice Volunteer training at the University of North Carolina Hospice in the fall of 2017. This was a great introduction to end-of-life issues and being with dying people. Hospice volunteering is also a great way to get experience with being a supportive and comforting presence, having end-of-life conversations with people, listening to their stories and sitting vigil close to death. Opportunities to volunteer have been very limited during the pandemic.

**INELDA Training**

I completed the [International End-of-Life Doula (INELDA)](https://www.inelda.org/) training in December of 2017. It was a 3-day, in-person intensive in New Orleans. Henry Fersko Weiss, INELDA founder, taught the course. I found it to be it to be filled with useful information, well facilitated and thoughtful. I appreciated the in-person aspects of it, particularly working with a small group to practice leading another in guided visualizations, active listening and other skills practice.

I have not participated in their virtual doula training or those taught by other organizations, so I can’t be of much help in comparing the experiences. But I have participated in INELDA’s webinars and self-paced business course and have found those materials to be of good quality. I anticipate the online training would be the same.

If you have Henry’s book, initially called *Caring for the Dying* and now called *Finding Peace at the End of Life: A Death Doula’s Guide for Families and Caregivers*, that gives a good sense of his style and the content of the course.

The INELDA training focused on the three aspects of doula work he centers in his book: Legacy, Vigil and Early Grief.  He shares guidance and materials on how to help people capture their legacy, examples of legacy projects, preparing yourself to sit vigil, preparing guided meditations with/for the dying person to manage pain and fear. Henry led us through guided visualization on our own end of life to create our own vigil plan as a practice for guiding people in planning their own vigil time.  There is also some useful guidance on end-of-life physical processes that can be useful in helping you guide people on what is normal and expected.

I have a degree in psychology, experience as a social worker, educator, and facilitator, deep training and experience in active listening, circle keeping and holding space.  And I still found this a useful training.

I took the course to help educate myself on how to support my mother's dying process. She died four months after I took the INELDA doula course and I am grateful for the preparation it provided me. She had a better dying experience because of it and my mother initiated me into death work.

**Paid vs. Volunteer**

Death Doula, Grief Partner and Death Educator are now growing into a small portion of my business after some effort, and it is not in any way something that I could live off of alone. I left my previous job that involved full-time work and frequent travel to become an independent consultant and coach. This allowed me flexibility in my work so I could be a doula. It was important to me to make space in my life for this work and if it grows over time, I will reduce other consulting work. For now, it is about ten percent of my annual income.

If you are seeking doula training to build your personal knowledge or your volunteer skills, that is great. It will serve you well. Learning about death and dying and how to support one another through those processes makes us better humans.

I know a lot of people who have done the training and are not yet making any money.  It is much harder than it seems because the general public doesn't know yet what a doula is or why they would need one. Few are willing or able to do private pay. These are all current limitations to making this a field where many of us can make a true living. There are a few people, though, who do and they are dedicated to building a web presence, advertising, doing public presentations, writing, etc. to get the word out. If you are prepared to do that and live in a relatively urban/densely populated area it may work out as a professional career option.

More opportunities may arise as the field evolves and awareness of what a death doula is and does expands. But for now, I want to be honest that this is a tough field to make a living in. The proliferation of doula-training programs does not always make clear that this is the case.

To the best of my knowledge there are not places in NC that hire death doulas in a full-time role and I don’t think it’s common in any place in the U.S. for doulas to be hired by a larger organization.  Insurance does not reimburse for it. For the most part, people seek training from one of the many organizations that train death doulas and then find opportunities to volunteer or to have people pay them occasionally for one-on-one services.  The vast majority of people trained as death doulas do not make any money at it.

I wish you good luck in finding meaningful work with those who are at the end of their lives! There is a need for more compassionate care and honest conversations about end of life in our culture. I hope you find a place in this work for you if that is what your heart is calling toward. I share some more resources and ideas below in case they are useful to you.

Warmly,

Dana Brinson

Consulting Betwixt

Consultingbetwixt.com

**Programs and Resources**

There are several organizations training doulas (and more than I've listed here), so I'd recommend doing some research on what feels like a good fit for you. Here are a few I looked more deeply into (or completed):

* I did the [International End-of-Life Doula Association (INELDA)](https://www.inelda.org/) training.  It's an intensive 3-day program (rather than stretched across weeks/months) which has benefits and drawbacks.  You can learn more about that training [here](https://www.inelda.org/training-calendar/) (and they are doing virtual trainings for now, if that is of interest).
* Alua Arthur at [Going with Grace](https://goingwithgrace.com/).  Hers is a bit more intensive (and a bit more costly) but I really love her approach to supporting people who are dying.
* Applied Thanatology program at the University of Maryland.  It's 2 years and $10,000. But it's an official certificate from a University <https://graduate.umaryland.edu/thanatology/>

Other organizations to check out I have heard of, but have not received doula training from:

* CareDoula: <https://www.certifiedcaredoula.com/certified-end-of-life-doula.html>
* Doula Givers: <https://doulagivers.com/>
* Institute for Birth Breath and Death: <https://birthbreathanddeath.com/>
* Lifespan Doulas: <https://lifespandoulas.com/end-of-life-doula-training/>
* Soul Passages: <https://soulpassages.ca/>
* Sacred Crossings: <https://sacredcrossings.com/>

**To learn more about how racism affects dying and death care in the United States,** I highly recommend watching "Sayin' It Louder: A conversation about a good death in a racist society." The six experts on the panel shared perspectives as black women who are professionals in various areas of the death/dying field.  Here is the [webinar recording](https://zoom.us/rec/play/vpV5dbugrjM3HNCUsgSDBad7W43oL_2s1iBKqKZYnx7gAHdQZFSvNeQVNyLJ5JCiv-ugZMvgyvCnXr0) . The panel experts are:

* **Alua Arthur**, Founder of Going with Grace, Death Doula, Attorney, Adjunct Professor and Ordained Minister: [Website](http://www.goingwithgrace.com/). [Instagram](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=f09f442bd0&e=d597a5f980). [Facebook](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=041785200d&e=d597a5f980). [Youtube](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=6cb3365ade&e=d597a5f980).
* **Joél Simone Anthony**, Licensed Funeral Director and Sacred Death & Grief Practitioner: [Website](https://www.thegravewoman.com/). [Youtube](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=0c3affe871&e=d597a5f980). [Instagram](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=3d6bda5507&e=d597a5f980). [Facebook](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=be3c6ba6eb&e=d597a5f980).
* **Naomi Edmondson**, Model, Artist, and Aspiring Death Doula: [Writing](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=e56b528c2b&e=d597a5f980). [Instagram](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=63a9ac59a5&e=d597a5f980).
* **Alica Forneret**, Writer and Facilitator for creating spaces for people to explore their grief: [Website](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=f723eb3d32&e=d597a5f980). [I](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=38a10989d8&e=d597a5f980)[nstagram](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=bc2126b1d9&e=d597a5f980). [Facebook](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=38a8cd6c62&e=d597a5f980). [Linked In](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=7aac382fc8&e=d597a5f980).
* **Oceana Sawyer**, End of Life Doula: [Website](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=362dbf4214&e=d597a5f980). [Instagram](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=cf994788d6&e=d597a5f980). [Facebook](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=705678d6b6&e=d597a5f980).
* **Lashanna Williams**, Doula, Massage Therapist, Deathcare Educator and Community Organizer: **Antares Wellness**[Website](https://antareswellness.com/end-of-life-care). [Facebook](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=43f33afa93&e=d597a5f980). [Instagram](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=9291e8f24a&e=d597a5f980). **A Sacred Passing Death Midwifery & Community Education**[Website](https://asacredpassing.org/). [Facebook](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=2f59ee87a9&e=d597a5f980). [Instagram](https://goingwithgrace.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=330eb0076608c686d6d9c7b9b&id=b20985d235&e=d597a5f980).

Here are additional links to resources about racism in deathcare:  <http://deathtalkproject.com/black-leaders-speak-out-on-racism-in-death-and-deathcare/>

**If you are looking to connect with other folks who are interested in talking about issues related to death and dying, there are Death Cafes that happen across the country**. In central NC, the Hillsborough Death Cafe and the Mebane Death Café are great resources.  If you want to sign up for info on them (and get GREAT summaries they send out after the events), then you can email the coordinators:

1. Neidra Clark (Hillsborough Death Cafe, and End of Life Doula) neidra@mindspring.com
2. Sara Willliams (Mebane Death Cafe and home funeral guide) shank1094@gmail.com